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C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 004203

NEA FOR BURNS/SATTERFIELD, NSC FOR ABRAMS/DANIN

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KWBG](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP WORRIED AS ARAFAT'S
CONDITION WORSENS

Classified By: Consul General David D. Pearce. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasir Arafat's health deteriorated suddenly the evening of November 3, according to ConGen sources in Ramallah, who said his doctors in Paris had moved him to an intensive care unit after he began vomiting and experiencing fatigue and fever. Negotiations Affairs Minister Sa'eb Erekat told DPO November 4 that his condition had stabilized overnight, and that his medical team would make an announcement regarding his health later in the day. Prime Minister Abu Ala'a's chief of staff, Hasan Abu Libdah, told the Consul General that Arafat's condition was serious and that information regarding his health was being closely held. The leadership of the PLO and Fatah are planning to meet November 4 to discuss the situation. End summary.

Sudden Setback

12. (C) Arafat's health deteriorated suddenly November 3. According to a source in the Mugatta'a who had been in contact with Arafat's entourage in Paris, Arafat suddenly began vomiting and developed a fever and increased fatigue, alarming his doctors, who moved him to an intensive care unit (ICU). National Security Adviser Jibril Rajub told DPO November 3 that he had spoken to Arafat's wife, Suha, and PLO UN rep Nasser al-Kidwah, who told him Arafat's condition was stable. Local Palestinian media reported November 4 that PLO rep to Paris Leyla Shahid confirmed that Arafat's condition had worsened and that he had been placed in the ICU. She said his medical team would make an announcement regarding the Chairman's health November 4 in the afternoon (Note: There was to have been an announcement November 3, but it never took place. Note.)

Alarm Bells Go Off

13. (C) Arafat's worsening condition fueled speculation among some PA officials that he was about to die, perhaps of poisoning. Sa'eb Erekat, repeating information he had already passed directly in Washington, told DPO at around 1 am November 4 that the PLO's representative to the UN, Nasser al-Kidwah, had phoned him urgently from Paris saying that Arafat had been poisoned by the GOI and insisting that Erekat enlist Washington's support for obtaining the antidote from the GOI (Comment: Al-Kidwah evidently phoned Erekat with this alarming report before Arafat's condition improved. End comment). Rajub called DPO at 2:30 am to report that Arafat's condition was stable and that press reports of a deterioration in Arafat's health had been sourced back to a Fatah Central Committee member who had leaked the earlier, dire reports to Reuters.

14. (C) In a subsequent conversation with DPO on November 4, Erekat said that he had spoken to Arafat's doctors, who informed him that the Chairman's condition had stabilized and he had stopped vomiting, that he remained in the ICU, and that his vomiting attack was similar to those he had suffered in Ramallah. Erekat assessed Arafat's health at "50 - 50." Prime Minister Abu Ala'a's chief of staff, Hasan Abu Libdah,

told the Consul General November 4 that Arafat's condition was serious, and that there was "some panic" among the leadership. He said that information regarding Arafat's health was being closely held, and that Abu Ala'a was very worried and would be participating in meetings of the leadership later in the day to discuss the situation.

15. (C) A source in ex-PM Abu Mazen's office said Abu Mazen would chair a meeting of the PLO Executive Committee and the Fatah Central Committee November 4. (Note: As secretary general of the PLO, Abu Mazen is next in line after Arafat; he is also the ranking member of Fatah, in the absence of Tunis-based Faruq al-Qaddumi. Abu Mazen reportedly canceled plans to fly from the UAE, where he attended Shaykh Zayyid's funeral, to Paris, after receiving news that Arafat's condition had stabilized. End note.)

Comment

16. (C) The sudden deterioration in Arafat's health November 3 has alarmed Palestinian officialdom in Ramallah, some of whom had been optimistically predicting his recovery and eventual return in time for the end-of-Ramadan feast in mid-November. In his conversation with the CG this morning, PM Abu Ala'a's chief of staff Abu Libdah, who is not prone to exaggeration or melodrama, sounded very concerned about Arafat's prognosis, implying that the leadership in meetings today might be planning for his succession. The continuing lack of information about the cause of Arafat's illness, coupled with reports of his continuing vomiting and fever attacks, has fueled wild speculation that he may have been poisoned by Israel, raising tensions among his staff in the Muqatta'a, who would naturally fall under suspicion.

PEARCE